NCA
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BOMBAY'S ARAB 'INVASION'

ANNCR:

THE MISFORTUNE OF BEIRUT, RAVAGED BY ALMOST CONTINUOUS STRIFE FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, NOW HAS PRODUCED UNEXPECTED DIVIDENDS FOR INDIA'S SECOND LARGEST CITY BOMBAY. VOA CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM OUR SOUTH ASIA BUREAU.

VOICE:

SINCE NINETEEN SEVENTY-FOUR, THE YEAR THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR BROKE OUT, A NUMBER OF TOURISTS VISITING BOMBAY FROM THE OIL-RICH COUNTRIES OF THE PERSIAN GULF HAS MORE THAN QUADRUPLED. THESE ARE TOURISTS WHO IN NORMAL TIMES WOULD HAVE GONE TO BEIRUT, WHICH WEALTHY ARABS USED TO REGARD AS THE PARIS OF THE MIDDLE EAST. MANY OWN LUSH VILLAS IN THE COOL MOUNTAINS OVERLOOKING BEIRUT. AND THE CITY, WITH ITS FINE RESTAURANTS, ITS CASINOS, AND GAY NIGHT LIFE WAS A MAGNET -- THE IDEAL MEETING PLACE OF OCCIDENT AND ORIENT.

BUT NOW, ALL THAT HAS GONE, PERHAPS FOREVER, LOST IN THE WASTE OF A FRATRICIDAL CONFLICT THAT SEEMINGLY HAS NO END. AND SO, LARGER AND LARGER NUMBERS OF TOURISTS FROM THE ARAB GULF STATES NOW ARE COMING TO BOMBAY -- IN MANY WAYS, THE MOST METROPOLITAN AND SOPHISTICATED OF INDIA'S CITIES. MANY COME SEEKING MEDICAL TREATMENT HELPED BY GOVERNMENT HEALTH PLANS WHICH PAY THE BULK COST OF MEDICAL CARE RECEIVED ABROAD. ALTHOUGH THEY COULD GO TO EUROPE FOR SUCH TREATMENT, MANY ARABS FROM THE GULF HAVE FOUND BOMBAY MORE CONGENIAL, THE CULTURAL GAP LESS DIFFICULT TO CROSS.

CONTRARY TO GENERAL IMPRESSIONS, INDIAN TOURISM OFFICIALS INSIST NOT ALL ARAB VISITORS ARE WEALTHY. NEVERTHELESS, QUITE A FEW ARE EXCEEDINGLY PROSPEROUS AND THEIR SPENDING HAS PROVIDED A HEALTHY BOOM TO BOMBAY'S ECONOMY. FINAL FIGURES HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED. BUT OFFICIALS ESTIMATE ARAB TOURISTS, LAST YEAR, SPENT MORE THAN THIRTY-FIVE MILLION DOLLARS IN THE CITY.

NATURALLY, THE BIG ARAB INFLUX HAS NOT BEEN WITHOUT ITS PROBLEMS, ESPECIALLY AT THE BEGINNING. BOMBAY CITIZENS SOMETIMES COMPLAIN THAT THE ARAB VISITORS WERE ARROGANT AND HAD BAD MANNERS. SOME OF THE ARABS COMPLAINED THAT THEY WERE CHEATED BY MERCHANTS AND TAXI DRIVERS BECAUSE THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE. BUT BOMBAY BUSINESSMEN AND CITY OFFICIALS WHO DON'T WANT TO LOSE THEIR NEW BONANZA HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO SOLVE SUCH PROBLEMS.

SIGNS IN ARABIC HAVE SPOUTED UP ALL OVER BOMBAY; HOTEL EMPLOYEES HAVE TAKEN CRASH COURSES IN ARABIC; AND POLICE HAVE MOVED TO STAMP OUT CHEATING. AND AS ONE BOMBAY HOTEL EXECUTIVE TOLD THIS CORRESPONDENT, THE ARAB TOURISTS THEMSELVES APPEAR TO HAVE GROWN MUCH WISER ABOUT PROTECTING THEIR INTEREST AND ABOUT NOT FLAUNTING THEIR WEALTH.

JS/RCS